

## **Testimony Regarding H.B. No. 7027**

February 21, 2017

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Rachel Chaleski. I am a Danbury resident and have two children in the Danbury Public School system. I am a “stay-at-home mom”, who chose to leave a career in corporate finance to focus on my family, as they are my first priority. I believe all of our children should be the priority in this critical budget season. They are our future.

Danbury schools are currently facing unprecedented hardships. As many of our surrounding districts are challenged with school closings and redistricting due to declining enrollment, Danbury schools are bursting at the seams as enrollment continues to soar beyond projections. This increase bears rising high levels of English language learners, low-income and special education students who require additional resources to have equal opportunity to learn and achieve success. As a result, our district has had to cut programs and struggles to hire and retain teachers. At the beginning of this school year, modifications were made to almost every school building to accommodate the influx of students, from installing partitions and relinquishing offices to doubling up teachers and students in single classrooms.

Danbury also falls short when it comes to school choice. We are the only large city in the state without a charter school. I have been working with a team of parents, community members, teachers and advocates to bring Danbury its first charter school, modeled after the successful Brooklyn Prospect Charter School in NY. This team will submit an application to the State Department of Education this summer, with the goal that Danbury Prospect Charter School will become a K-12 college preparatory school offering the rigorous International Baccalaureate program. Once approved, this school will help to relieve overcrowding, provide more choice for Danbury families and raise the bar of academic performance.

We need a comprehensive, long-term solution for fair education funding based on student-level data and one that takes into account the efficiencies and deficiencies of each district; but please also consider equitable funding for ALL public school types. My two children are receiving an exceptional education at the Western CT Academy for International Studies Elementary Magnet School. A few years ago, my husband and I opened our home to Henry Abbott Technical High School to do work that we would not have otherwise been able to afford. These schools offer students and families amazing opportunities and expose them to an array of experiences. Magnets, charters, state technical high schools, vocational agricultural schools and open choice programs are all public school options serving CT students, many in the most impoverished parts of the state. It would only be fair to include these schools in the conversation of fair, accurate and transparent funding.

Thank you for this opportunity and for putting our children first!

Rachel Chaleski  
Danbury, CT